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# The Emerging Rural Communities of Beadle County

W. F. Kumlien

Howard M. Sauer

C. Scandrette

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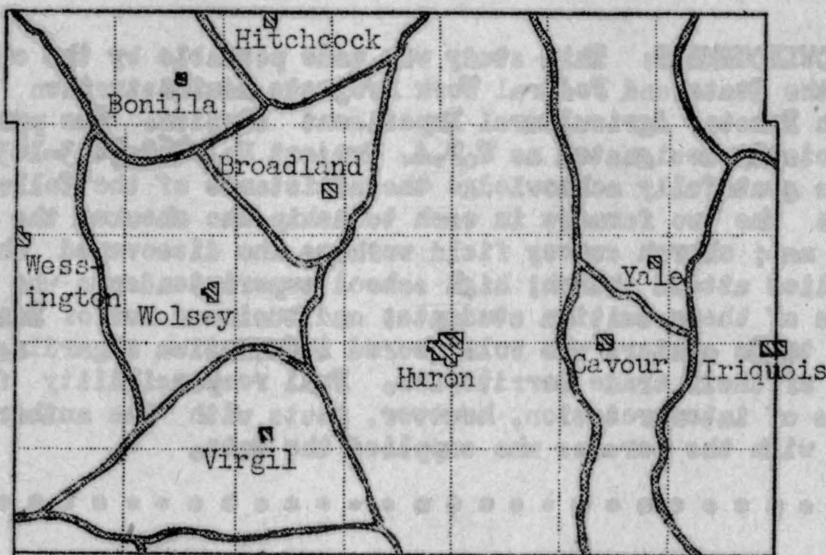
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THE EMERGING RURAL COMMUNITIES  
of  
Beadle County

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South Dakota State College, Brookings, South Dakota

W. F. Kumlien  
Howard M. Sauer  
C. Scandrette



In the period of early settlement in Beadle County the farmer's contacts were largely limited to his immediate neighborhood. He seldom traveled more than three or four miles--a distance commonly known as a "team haul." In recent years, improved transportation facilities have permitted farm families to go to the village for an increasing proportion of their goods and services. As rural folks have extended their radius of interaction, larger village-centered communities have emerged.

Department of Rural Sociology  
Agricultural Experiment Station of the South Dakota State College of  
Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Brookings, South Dakota

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\* than with the persons who supplied the data. \*

\*\*\*\*\*

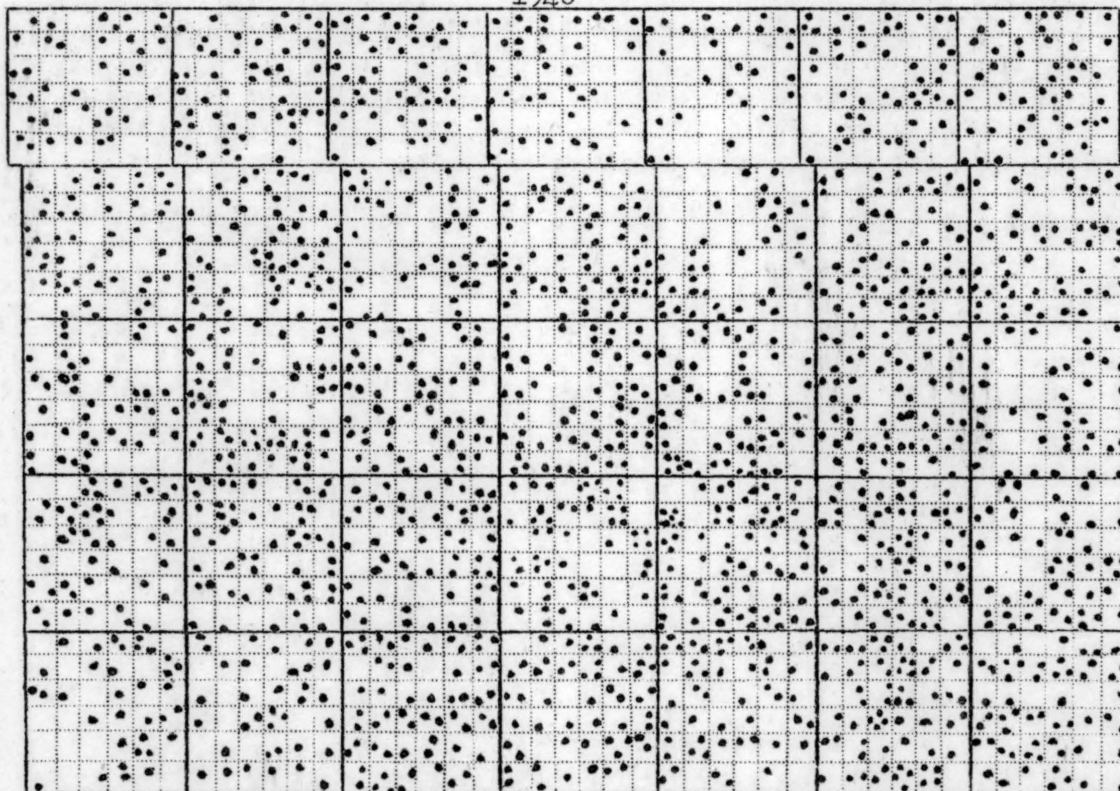


## The Emerging Rural Communities of Beadle County

People can be most effectively reached and influenced through the social groups to which they belong. It is the purpose of this pamphlet to assist planning groups and other action agencies in Beadle county by locating the principle rural groupings in the form of neighborhoods and communities of the county. For a better understanding of the present day status and function of these social groupings, a brief historical sketch is given, with emphasis on the factors leading to the emergence of the rural community which encompasses both town and country.

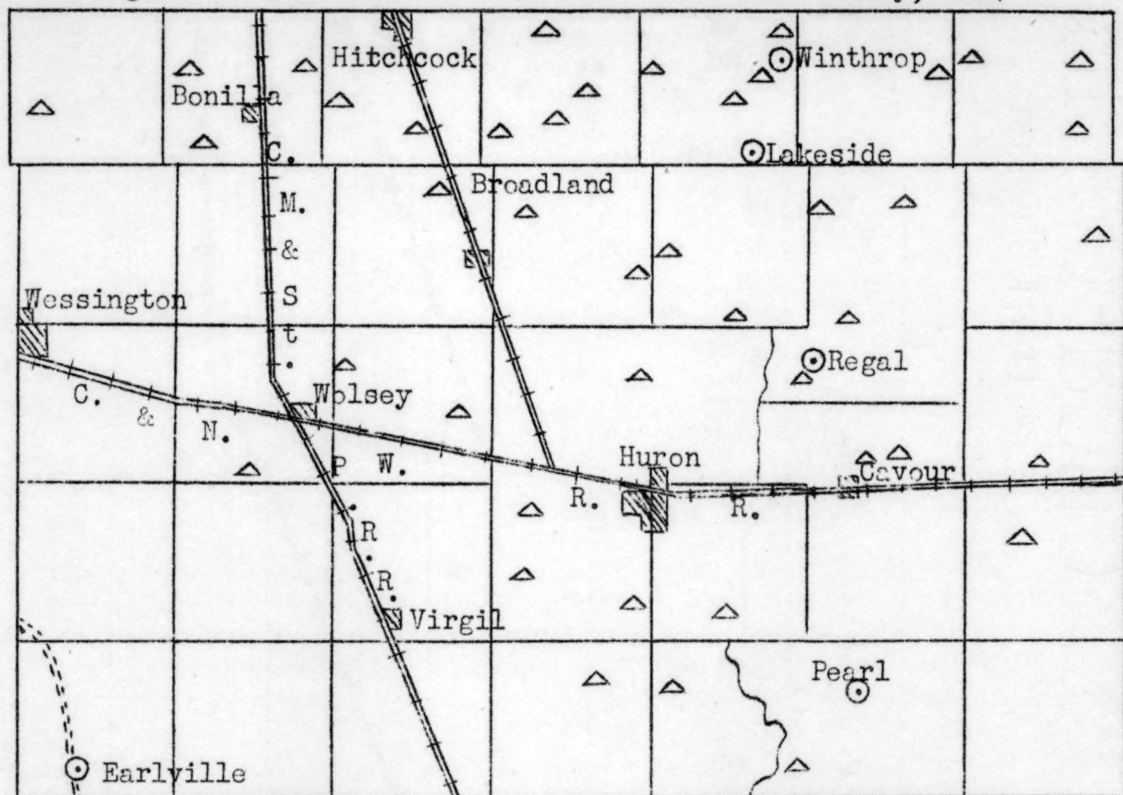
It is evident that something is wrong with the map below. It is apparent that such important features as villages and highways have been omitted. The 1,725 farmsteads cannot be thought of as so many isolated settlements, but must be considered in relation to their neighborhood and their larger village-centered community settings. The country and village dwellers are interdependent; the country looks to the village for such services as merchandising, recreation, education, etc., and the village depends upon the country for raw materials, trade and support of its institutions.

Figure 1. The location of the 1,725 Farmsteads of Beadle County, 1940



Source: General Highway Map of South Dakota, State Highway Planning Survey - 1938

Figure 2. Trade and Service Areas in Beadle County, 1884



Legend:  $\triangle$  School  $==$  Railroad  $\blacksquare$  Early town still in existence  
 $\triangle$  Church - - - Trail  $\square$  Early town out of existence  
 $\odot$  Postoffice

Source: Andrea's Historical Atlas of South Dakota

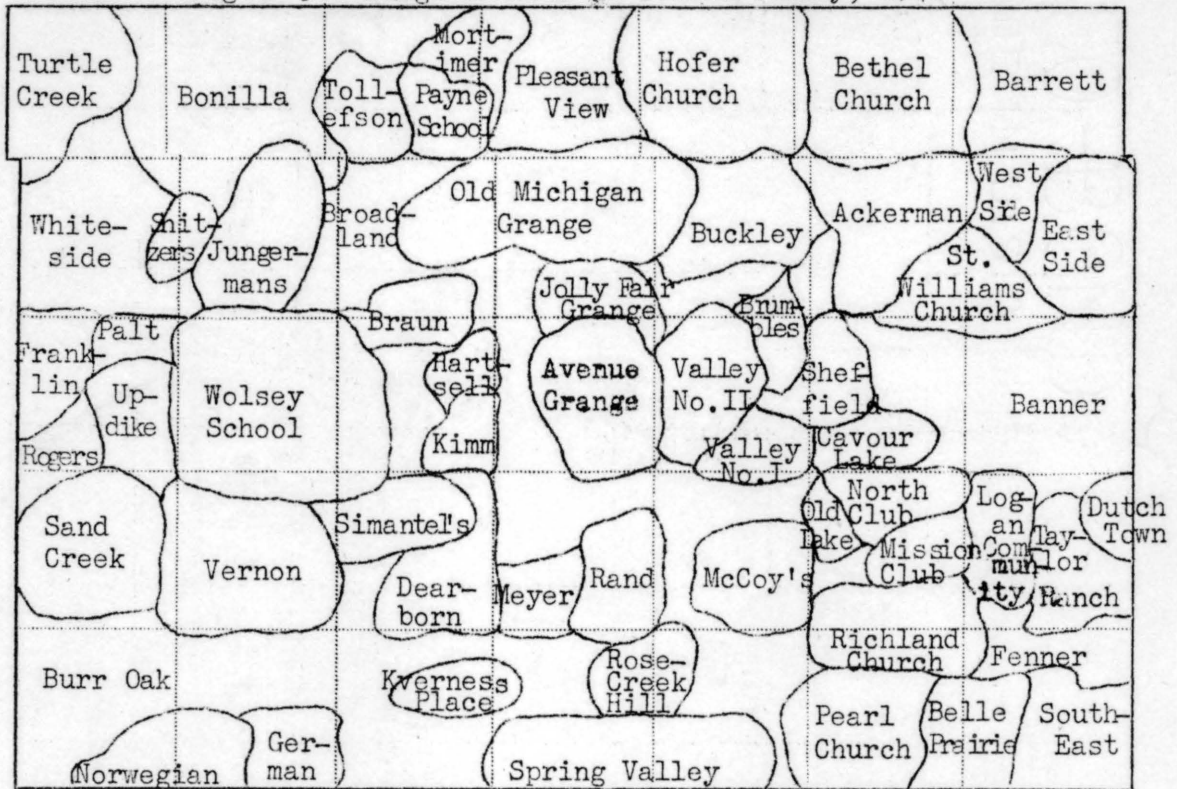
The pioneer farmer was not wholly self-sufficient from an economic standpoint. He was dependent on the villages, which appeared on the frontier at an early date, for his supply of many essential goods and services.

The first permanent settlers came to Beadle county in the spring of 1879 and established residence near the Pearl river. By fall of that year the first town of Cavour was plotted. Huron and Hitchcock made their appearance the following spring; Wessington two years later, and Wolsey in 1883. By 1884, three more hamlets, Bonilla, Virgil and Broadland, had been laid out and there were now eight thriving villages in the county. These rapidly growing towns brought a diversity of services and a wide range of supplies to the hundred or more scattered farm places. Four years after its establishment, Huron boasted of 3,000 residents and served a large area with well developed social and economic institutions—included were eight manufacturing industries, three newspapers, telephone system, hotel, eight financial houses, a fine school, and six churches. Similar services were offered at Hitchcock by its 15 business places. Cavour drew trade in the eastern townships; Wessington gave the western Beadle county residents numerous services; and Wolsey became a shipping point at the juncture of the two railroads. (See Figure 2.)

By 1884, the Chicago and Northwestern railroad had traversed the county centrally east to west and had built a north branch out of Huron. A second railroad, the Chicago, Minnesota and St. Paul, had also crossed the western half, north and south; thus the exchange of products and services were made easier than in some other frontier counties. In addition to these transportation facilities, five post-offices; Earlville in the southwest and Pearl, Regal, Lakeside and Winthrop on a north-south trail through the eastern townships, brought mail to country dwellers. Beadle county also had an excellent educational system at this early date, and taught the rudiments of learning in 43 schools.



Figure 3. Neighborhoods in Beadle County, 1940



The early settlers of Beadle county, bound together by such ties as kinship, common religion, common nationality, and mutual assistance, tended to homestead in groups on adjoining farms. Those neighborhood groupings were especially important in supplying the social satisfactions of the pioneer community. Habits of work exchange and united support of educational and religious institutions tended to draw the families comprising the neighborhood still closer together.

Better facilities for transportation and communication have had far-reaching effects on rural group organization. Farm folks have been able to extend their contacts over a much wider area, reaching out beyond the bounds of their local neighborhoods. They have gone more frequently to the village and have discovered they have much in common with village residents. As a result of these forces neighborhoods have declined in importance, some have disappeared, while others have lost certain functions to the village center. Figure 3 shows the neighborhoods which were in existence in Beadle county in 1940. These neighborhoods are probably fewer in number and larger in area than those which existed prior to the advent of the automobile. Although their functions are relatively limited, the neighborhoods of Beadle county have shown a tendency to persist. Some of the factors which enter into neighborhood bonds are "work exchange," "country church," "district school," "same nationality," and "clubs." "Kinship" and "visiting" are also significant ties for neighborhood demarcation. It would appear that the neighborhood still plays a rather significant role in the rural picture, although its importance will probably continue to decline.

Figure 4. Church Community Areas of Beadle County, 1940

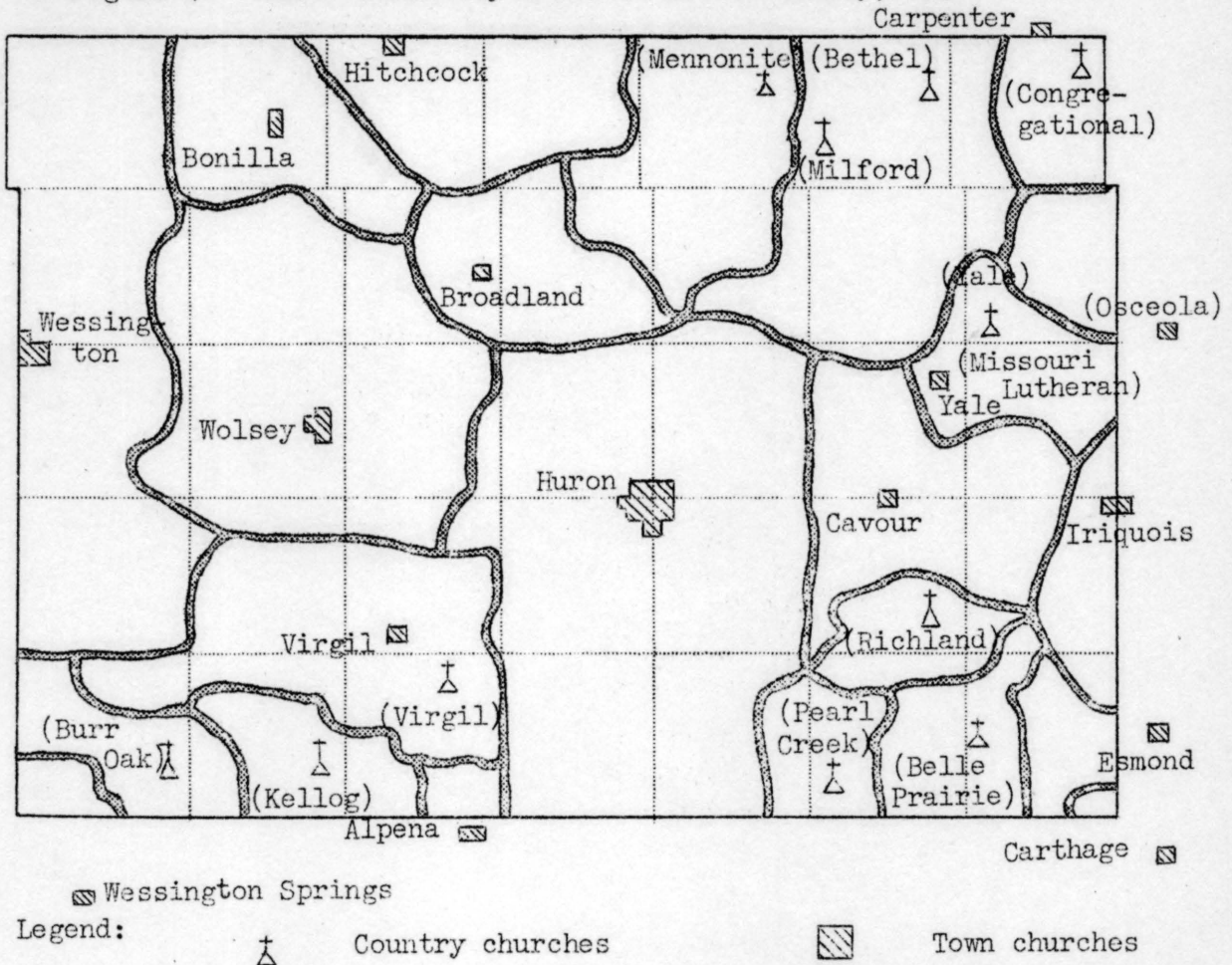


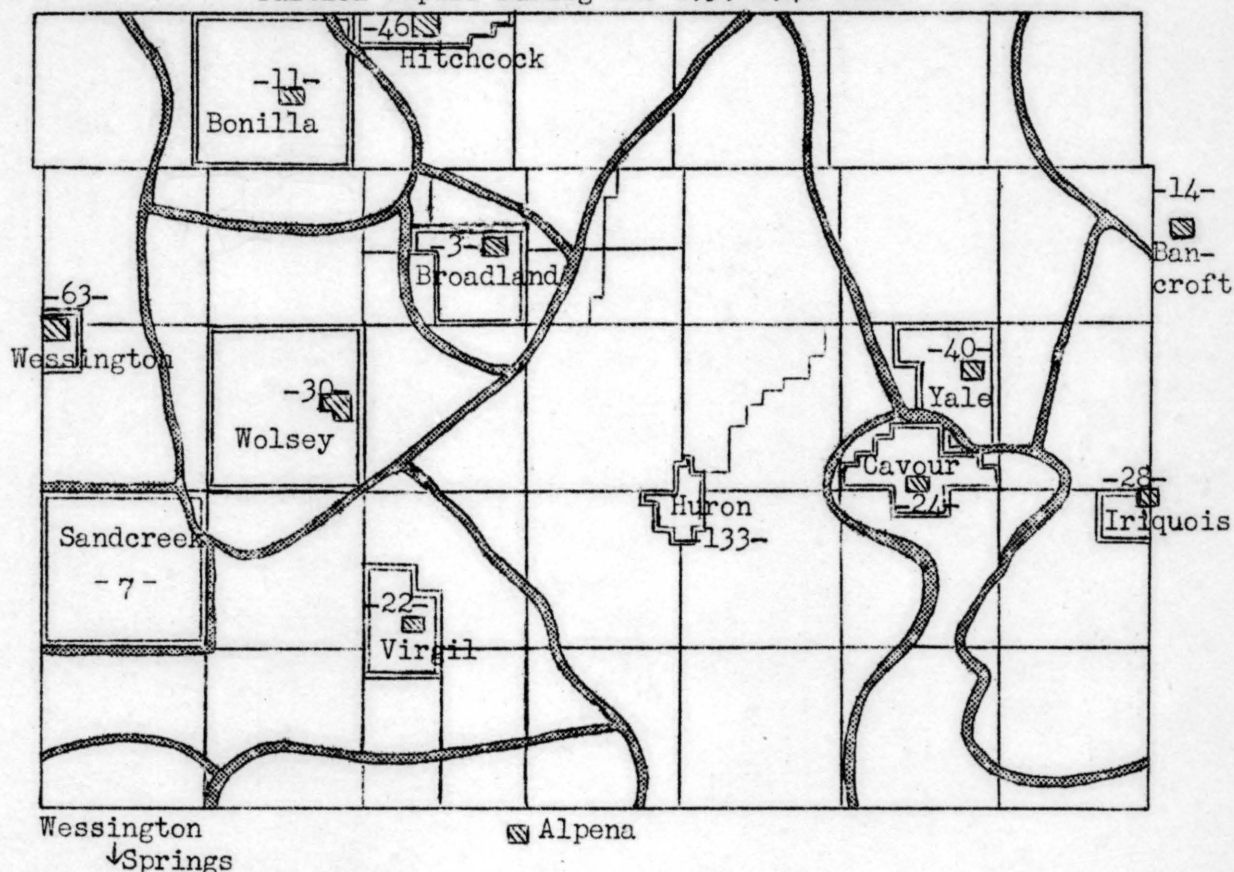
Figure 4 shows the various areas from which the village and open country churches of Beadle county draw their members. It is readily seen that the attendance areas of the town churches are considerably larger than those served by the open country churches. It seems that people will not travel as far to attend church as they will to obtain certain other services.

The great number of churches located in Beadle county, 33 in towns and villages, and 11 in the open country naturally limits the size and increases the number of church areas as compared with the service areas which are more completely village centered. Eighty-three percent of the farm families attended church in Beadle county. The denominational order of their preference is Lutheran, Methodist, Mennonite, Catholic, Presbyterian, and others.

However, more and more farm families are attending town churches --a factor which has tended to strengthen town-country relationships. In many sections, the number of participating farm families has become too small to support adequately the open country church. The village churches may eventually take over the religious function for the entire surrounding area.



Figure 5. Areas from which High Schools Enrolled Their Beadle County Tuition Pupils During the 1939-1940 Term



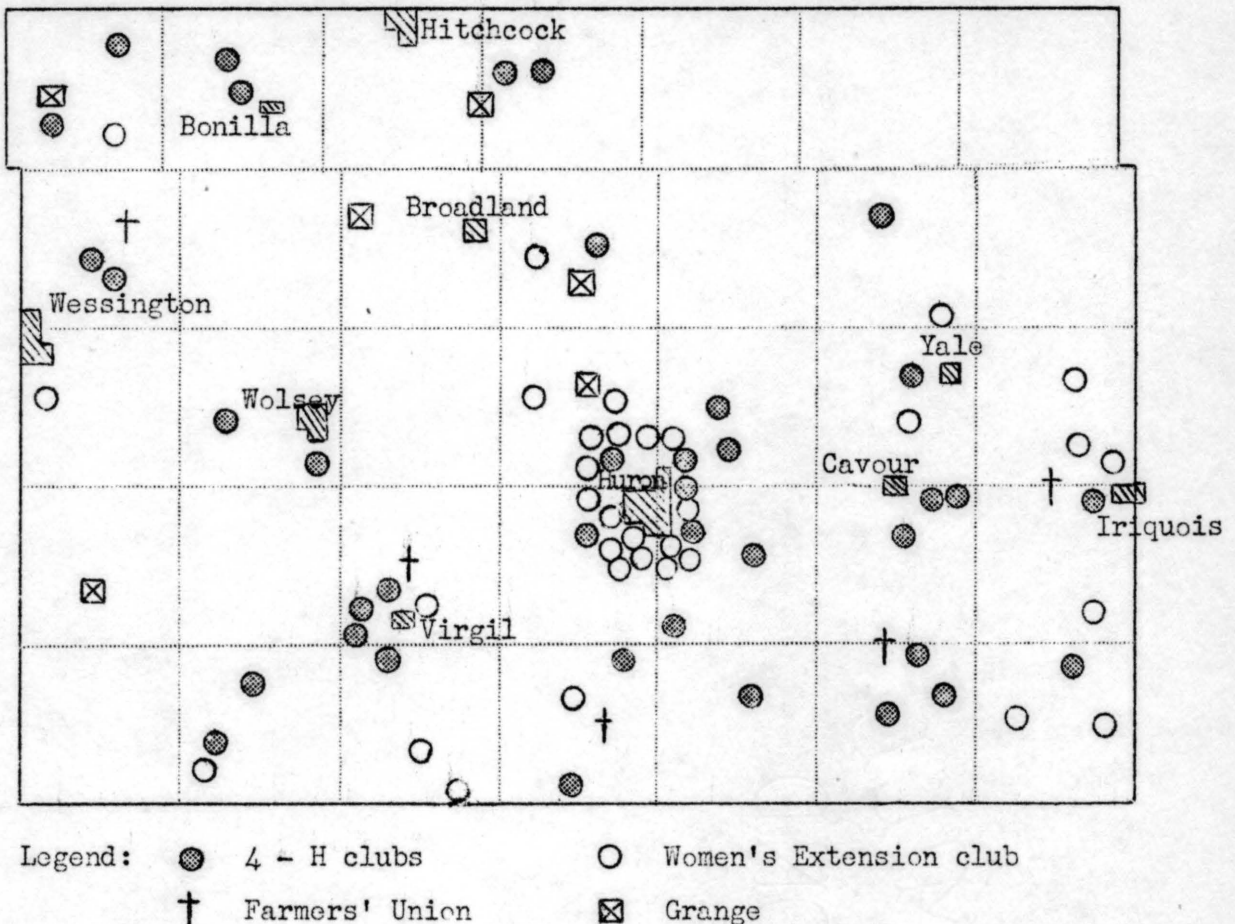
Source: Records of High School Superintendents

Since 1921 it has been compulsory for common school districts which do not operate their own high schools to pay tuition costs for students living within their borders who attended high schools in nearby towns or villages. The areas from which the fourteen high schools (11 in Beadle county, two in Jerauld, and one in Kingsbury) enrolled the Beadle county tuition students are plotted in Figure 5. Some 300 students are drawn from outlying farmsteads to the centrally located consolidated or independent high schools.

The high school service areas correspond rather closely to the composite community areas shown in Figure 8. The high school has become a very strong force in determining community boundaries and in establishing closer town-country relationships. The farmer who has sons or daughters in the village high school concerns himself with its organization and activities. He goes into the village more frequently and as he broadens his contacts with the village people he joins with them in an increasingly varied range of activities. His children in high school make still further adjustments to the larger village centered community life. Through these processes, differences and misunderstandings which may have existed between town and country are gradually disappearing.



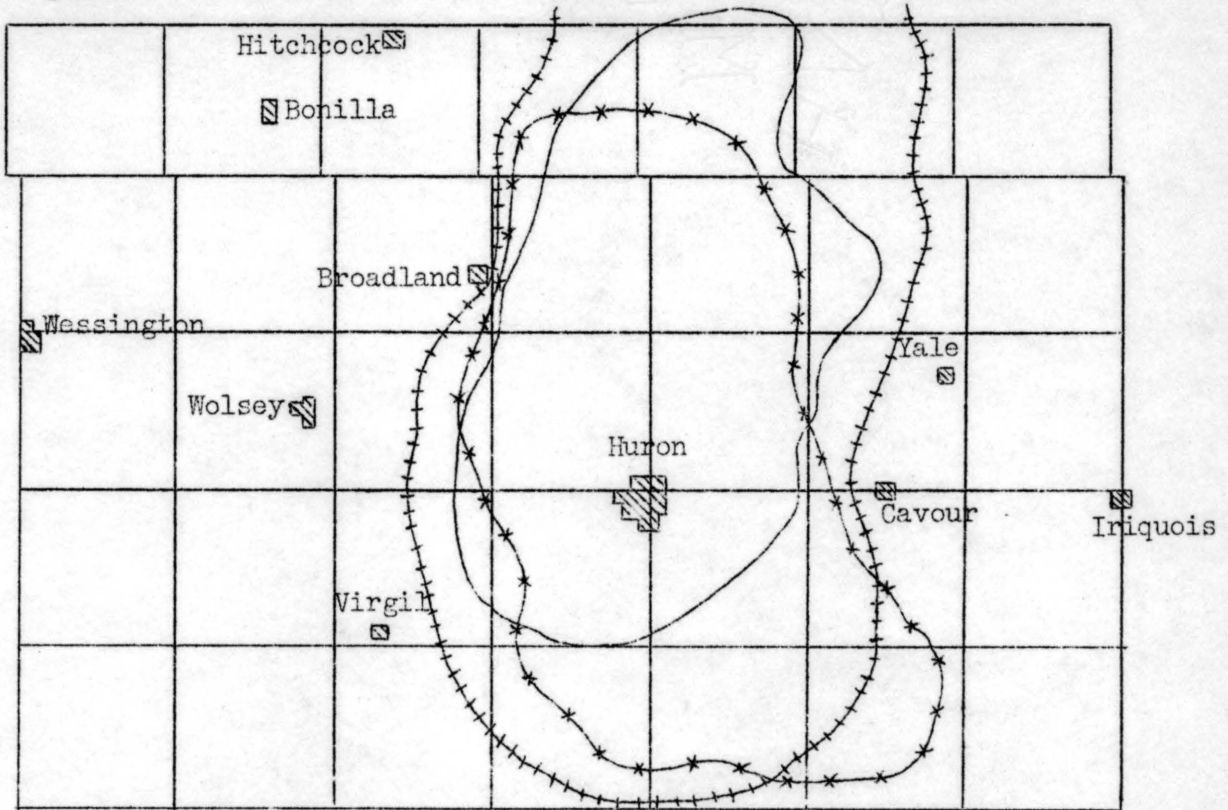
Figure 6. Rural Special Interest Groups in Beadle County, 1940



In the period of early settlement in Beadle county, residence in a specific locality, proximity, and common life served as the basis for most group organization. The school district, the open country church, exchange of work, and social activity followed neighborhood lines. Interests were relatively limited and held in common; therefore, group organizations were simple and included almost everyone within the neighborhood.

With the coming of better facilities for travel and communication the country dwellers were able to seek satisfactions in groups of their own choice. The farmer has been exposed to new types of interest groups and associations which often go far beyond neighborhood bounds in recruiting their participants. In 1940, 82 special interest organizations were found among the farm people of Beadle county. Thirty-nine of these groups were 4-H clubs, 33 were Women's Extension clubs, and 11 were Farmers' Unions or Granges. (See Figure 6.) These categories do not include informal social gatherings or farm membership in town centered organizations such as service clubs and lodges. It is evident that group activities, like other aspects of rural life, are being reorganized on a wider community level.

Figure 7. Trade Areas for Three Selected Commodities, Huron, 1940



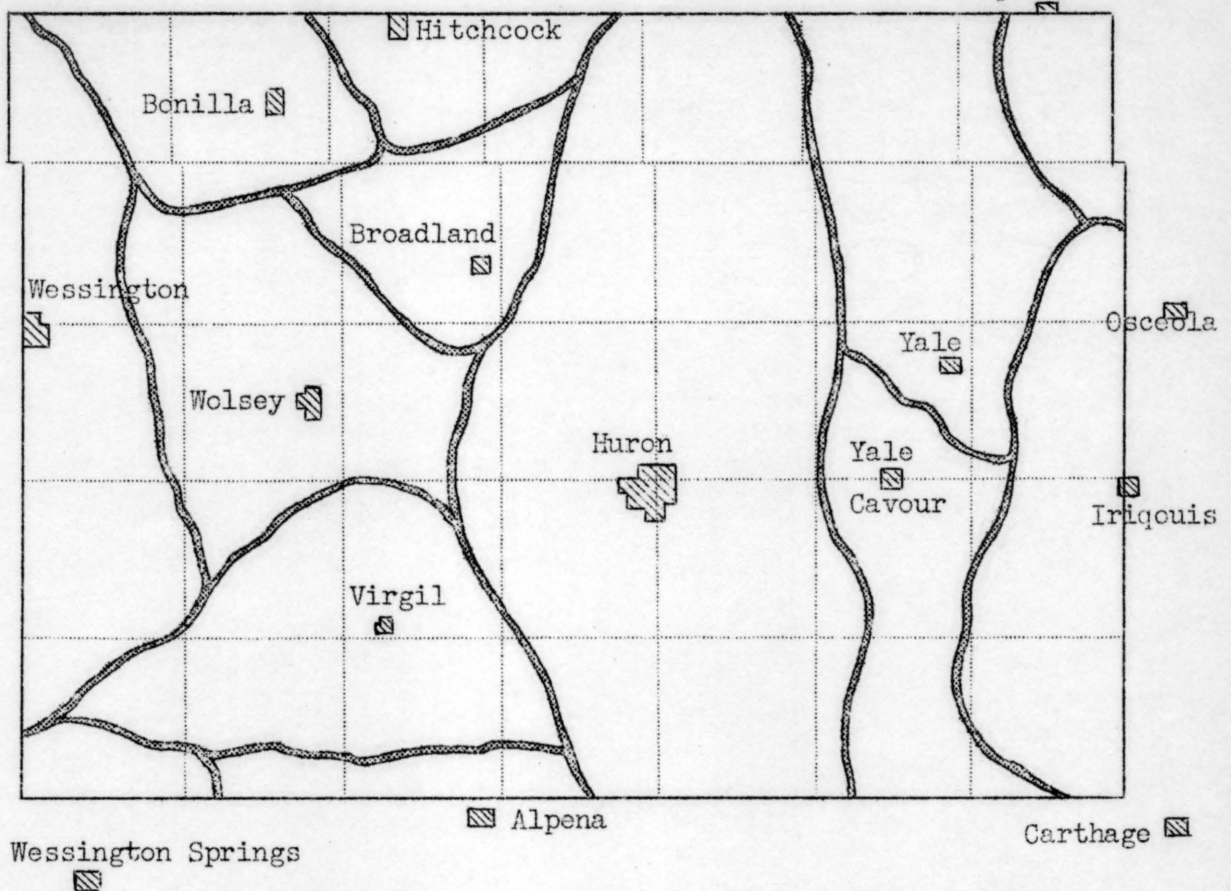
Legend:

———— Bulk fuel      - - - - - Grain      - x - x - Groceries

The farm family, as previously noted, has always been somewhat dependent upon village centers for the satisfaction of its economic needs. Since the coming of the automobile, many functions which were formerly neighborhood-centered have been shifted to the village. Improved transportation and communication facilities in recent years have greatly increased the number of trips made to the village, as well as the variety and quantity of goods and services supplied by the village centers. The cross-roads general store has all but passed from the picture; the village has become the economic core of the surrounding farm area. It serves as a market for agricultural produce and, in turn, supplies the farmer with his groceries, clothing, goods used in the farming enterprise—oil, twine fencing, machinery, etc., and many other necessities. Increasing interdependence of town and country in their trade relationships is evident.

Figure 7 shows the trade areas of Huron for three commodities selected because of their importance to the farmer. These commodities are bulk fuels, grain, and groceries. Since the boundaries are based upon information supplied by Huron tradesmen, they represent only personal estimates, and it has been found that there is considerable overlapping with trade areas secured in similar fashion for other towns of the county. Despite their limitations, Figure 7 does show the approximate areas served by dealers in the selected commodities. By combining the trade, church, and high school service areas it is possible to arrive at a composite community area for Huron (See Figure 8) which rather closely describes the natural community boundaries.

Figure 8. Composite Community Areas in Beadle County, 1940



"A rural community is regarded as an area including the village center and the surrounding territory, the limits of the territory being determined by the farthest distances where the agencies and institutions of the village serve the majority of the families in a majority of their activities." DWIGHT SANDERSON

\* \* \* \* \*

Until about 25 years ago, the rural community was relatively unimportant and hardly existent in recognizable form. The social life of farm people was centered largely in the neighborhood. The one-room country school and the open country church, two important rural institutions, strengthened the neighborhood ties. More recently the tremendous advances in transportation and communication have brought widespread changes in the structure of rural group life. Depopulation through outward migration has weakened many neighborhoods. Others have lost their principle functions with the decline of the district school. A larger number of farmers are going to the village for church services and are sending their children to the village school.

The same forces which have led to the decline of neighborhoods have been responsible for the reorganization of rural life on a larger community basis. Many of the functions dropped by the neighborhoods have been assumed by village centers. Figure 8 shows the composite community areas of Beadle county. These areas are located by first plotting on a single map the trade, high school, and church service areas for each village, then selecting a boundary in each case which was most representative of all the plotted areas. Equitable divisions were made of those regions subject to over-lapping claims by two or more villages.



## SUMMARY

Various historical changes in social organization have been shown in this pamphlet in order to trace the gradual emergence of the present rural community. The rural neighborhood, of which the community is essentially an enlarged reproduction, functioned best during the horse and buggy days. It consisted of ten to twenty families which frequently clustered about some single economic or social service, such as a general store, a blacksmith shop, post office, a rural school or a church. In some instances the neighborhood was merely a social grouping held together by some such common bond as kinship, neighborliness or exchange of work.

With the coming of the automobile and good roads most of the economic services were readily taken over by the village or town. The only institutions left in many open-country areas were the rural schools and churches. Even the open-country churches have been giving way during the last few years. At the present time they make up less than one-fourth of all churches in the state, and of those which remain only 7 percent have resident ministers. Most country churches are now yoked with a town church, with the same minister serving two or more congregations.

During the past decade the rural district school system has declined in much the same manner. Recent studies reveal that rural school enrollments for the state have declined more than 25 percent since the peak year of 1930. Over half of the open-country schools enroll ten or fewer pupils, and in some counties as many as 25 to 30 percent enroll five or fewer. When the enrollment drops to five or below, it has been customary to close the school and send the remaining pupils to a neighboring school, paying tuition and transportation costs. In some cases the remaining pupils have been sent to nearby village or town schools.

It now appears that the villages and towns are becoming the service centers for the rural community. The village center and its surrounding service area constitute the new rural community, which makes up the prevailing type of social organization in South Dakota. Thus in a typical county there will be as many rural communities as there are villages and towns.

## IMPLICATIONS

There are definite implications growing out of this situation both for the farmer and the townsman. For the farmer it means that he is just as truly a member of the rural community as is the village resident. The fact that he can obtain the various economic and social services in the center at a reasonable cost makes it possible for him to be a specialist in agricultural production. Likewise for the townsman it means that he can specialize in his particular field of service as long as he serves his open country and town neighbors efficiently. Thus there are distinct mutual advantages in maintaining harmonious town-country relationships.

Public servants, such as extension agents, FSA and AAA workers, teachers, ministers, etc., should recognize that the new rural community is a natural community which has evolved through gradual economic and social adjustments. All planning activities should take into account the natural community areas and should utilize them as the logical units of rural organization.